

CONFIDENT IN LIFE'S BATTLES; PSALM 27 • Living Confidently #1

Boris Pasternak's epic novel *Doctor Zhizago* is the story of a young physician from an upper class family in Czarist Russia. He was a man who wanted to live an ordinary and a good life, not particularly desiring to be an exceptional or a famous man. He wanted to practice medicine. He wanted to enjoy marriage. He wanted to raise a family. He wanted to experience all the goodness that life had to offer.

But the year was 1917, and there was revolution in the air. Revolution that caught him up, and so as he continually throughout the long story seeks to escape into the privacy of his own world and his own priorities, he repeatedly discovers that that is an impossibility. And so whether in the city of Moscow or in the distant places of the Euromountains. He cannot find escape. The battles go wherever he goes. It is impossible for him he discovered to escape life's battles. Impossible for him and probably impossible for us. Around us, behind us, in front of us, and maybe most of all inside of us those battles continue to rage. For one person it is a different battle than for another person. For one person it is some kind of intellectual fray or doubt. Maybe other people don't much identify with that but for that person who agonizes in the mind with some intellectual decision or concern it is a very real and difficult battle. Maybe the person who has that intellectual fray does not really understand the person whose battle is with depression. She cannot quite understand how it is so hard for that person to get up every morning and to cope with life and to get out of the pit on any kind of a regular basis and make it through all of the assaults that this life has.

For others the battles are yet quite different. For one it is illness and for another it is the critics with which they live. For another it may be singleness or parenthood. For others homosexuality or anger. For some it is the battle with success and for others it is the battle with failure. I find that one of the constant themes that I hear recurring as people sometimes share with me their troubles, it is the sense of uniqueness in their own battles. So I hear people say to me, "Pastor, I'm sure that no one else at Wooddale Church has the same kind of problem that I have. I'm sure that other Christians aren't up against the same kind of things that I am up against. I'm sure that other people would be aghast if they knew, and you must never tell them, that I am having difficulty of all people with my finances. Or the horrors that I am going through with my children. Or the problems that have plagued my marriage. Or my doubts about some of the

cardinal doctrines of Christianity. Of all people that I should have those kinds of concerns." And each time I listen to those battles that people have I reassure them that they are not alone. Sometimes I am free enough to be able to say, "You may think this is a strange comment to make but do you know that you are the third or the fourth person this week or this month who has shared that very same concern and is facing that same battle?" That when we gather together in our services on Sunday morning there is not a single one of us who sit in any of the seats in any of the services who does not struggle with battles themselves? And then I tell them that you can run from Minneapolis to Moscow or from the Rocky Mountains to the Euromountains and you will find that everywhere you go with everyone you meet the battles still rage? Or maybe you find that almost frighteningly depressing because maybe throughout this past week the battle has been particularly ferocious with you. You have thought to yourself, "well at least I can get up on a winter morning and go to church and there find some encouragement only to walk in the door and hear some pastor tell me that everybody has problems and it seems to be the pits and difficulties for everybody that all kinds of people are struggling with all kinds of the same thing. That may sound like the bad news, but there is good news. Good news that while there is no escape from life's battles the good news that God calls us to confidence. Confidence in him through and amid those life's battles. That was the discovery of King David in Psalm 27 from which the choir already has sung this morning. He boldly declared in Psalm 27:3 'Though a host encamp against me my heart shall not fear. Though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. Oh! It sounds so easy. It is almost as if David is saying, Ah! Bring it on. Let the battles rage it makes no difference. It's okay. I have confidence, confidence in God. But the truth of it is that such confidence is seldom easy to come by and it is seldom easy for any of us and it was not easy for David. Now understand who David was. He has the unusual description in Scripture of being a man who was after God's own heart. He was an incredible man. He was a Godly and a righteous man. He was a man who penned for us much of Old Testament scriptures and Psalms. He was a man who was a predecessor in the royal line of Jesus Christ himself, and yet he was also a man who was intensely loyal to another king-King Saul. And the reward to his loyalty was that he was betrayed. He was a man who had a very close friend named Jonathan who was murdered. He was a man who struggled with a flame in his own soul of lust, and that flame when it burned out led him into adultery and even murder. He was a man who sought to be a good parent and yet whose own son Absalom turned against him, betrayed him, hated him and

divided the kingdom that God had called upon him to establish. So for King David life's battles were too fierce to speak of any kind of easy confidence. His answer to God's call for confidence is found in three prayers in Psalm 27 and I invite you to them this morning. The first of those prayers in verses 1-6 is a prayer of confidence of depending. But we need to understand what this confidence is. The Hebrew word that is translated confident in verse 3 of Psalm 27 means quite literally 'things depended on.' That's good-so, if you have self-confidence you depend upon yourself. If you have no confidence then you don't have anyone or anything to depend upon. And if you have God confidence then you are depending as on God himself. That makes sense because we understand that when we fight life's battles we usually chose to depend upon someone or something. If we get sick we contact a physician, and we depend upon the physician and the physician's medicines. When we are lonely we depend upon friendships-friendships we hope we have built before that loneliness particularly strikes. If we are threatened then we depend upon the police or upon locks or upon guns. However, history and experience tells us that sometimes the things upon which we depend turn out to be undependable. So we get sick only to find out that there is no doctor who can diagnose our illness. Or we take the medicine only to discover that it makes us feel worse instead of better. Or we turn to a friend that we thought was the most dependable of friends in the midst of loneliness there to find a friend who does not make our loneliness go away. Or, we depend upon the locks, and the police and the guns and we find out that we are assaulted nevertheless. What are the alternatives that are left then to us? If we cannot have confidence in other people or other things we can become desperate as many people have and say then there is no confidence. All I can do is live in fear. There is no one/nothing that is worth depending upon. Or, we can turn to God's confidence and depend upon God. That is whom David chose. And so, the first six verses of Psalm 27 are David's written response-written by the way in music. As someone said to me after *Gordon Boor preached last Sunday morning, "Does this mean that you are going to be singing in sermons from now on?" I told him, "Only for humor and not for effect." I'll not sing for you the first six verses but David in all probability did sing them. Writing not only the words but the music. How did confidence sound when he sang it? Well, he sang, "The Lord is my light and my salvation-whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life-of whom shall I be afraid? He sang, God is great. If God is good enough to show me the light of his revelation, if he is good enough to save me from the snatches of hell, any God who can do that is stronger than anyone who can

scare me, so there is no one who can frighten me. He sings on, "When evildoers assail me uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and my foes they shall stumble and fall. David concludes, "Look it is me against them. And when the bad guys come after me I have the confidence in God they will lose. You'll see. They will find out in the long run that they will stumble and fall in the race. The host encamp against me. My heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. He says, "when my enemies surround me and even if there is war against me. I'll depend upon God. And when I depend upon God I can be absolutely confident. One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." Remember that at this point in history the temple in Jerusalem had not yet been built, so David speaks not of some physical building but he speaks of the presence of God himself. And he says that you can take all that the world has to offer good and bad and you compare that to the privilege of living in the presence of God in this life and forever in another life and that is better than anything good or bad that this world can possibly give. "For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent. He will set me high upon a rock. He sang I know my God and he will take care of me." He'll take care of me no matter what. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me and I will offer in his tent sacrifice with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody to the Lord." David concludes that no matter how things may temporarily appear he is an ultimate winner, and so he will sing to the Lord. Now that is how confidence sounds when David sings it. What does it do? What does it do for David and what does it do for us. Well, I'll tell you that kind of confidence sets us free. Sets us free from fear. It is confidence in God that determines the ultimate outcome of life's battles. It is a marvelous, marvelous experience. Ah! It does not mean that life's battles disappear. It does not mean that they do not have to be fought. They will still rage, but what we must do is utilize the resources that God has given to us. That may be the medicine. That may be the physician. That may be the lock upon the door. That may be the friend in time of loneliness, but the point of it all is that God is the one who gives us the confidence for the ultimate victory and peace. This past week I reread some of the sections of Dr. Helen Rosevears* autobiography He Gave Us a Valley. Some of you will remember Dr. Rosevears the British physician that missionaried to what was then the Belgian Congo in Africa. She ministered here a couple of years ago on a Sunday morning; in fact, we even rearranged our

service schedule to accommodate her schedule. She is an amazing, amazing woman. A missionary to the Belgian Congo now Zaire, during a particularly vicious transition time as that country moved from Colonial rule into its own independence. Helen Rosevear as you can quickly tell from meeting her or reading her story dearly loved her people. She was incredibly faithful to God and sacrificed a significant career as a physician in England in order to meet the needs of the people in Africa, and they turned against her. The rebels came in and they imprisoned her for five months. They beat her. They chipped her tooth right in the front. They bloodied her. They assaulted her. They raped her. Finally she got afraid and she went back to England for a year. And then she faced what for her I am sure was the most difficult question of her life. In the second chapter of her autobiography that is called 'Am I willing to return?' She tells how she goes through the struggle, the decision of going back to where all of these things happened. And she explains how she became convinced of the truth of Romans 8:28. That in everything God works for good with those who love him. And so she went back and returned to Africa in March of 1966. Now to me at least that seems to be the epitome of confidence in life's battles. She depended not upon what she could do but upon what he could do. She depended upon the Lord. Now if I am right we've all got those kinds of battles. You've got them and I've got them. People against us. Problems. Decisions. Difficulties. Maybe the words of David seem particularly applicable. Maybe the armies do surround you. Maybe the wars are wounding you. Well you pray? As David prayed. "Though a host encamp against me my heart will not fear. Though war arise against me yet I will be confident." Ah! But there is more to David's song. He does not stop his singing with verse six, he goes on. And let me tell you that some Bible scholars find the second six verses such an unbelievable contrast to the first six that they have concluded they could not have been written by the same man. No one who has the confidence in God that is described in Psalm 27 1-6 could possibly utter much less write the things that are in the next six verses. Because while the first six verses may be a prayer of confidence depending upon God the next six 7-12 are the song of a prayer of uncertainty and doubt. Now we defined confidence a couple of minutes ago as what you depend upon, and we also ought to define doubt. Understand that doubt is not unbelief. When you doubt something it does not mean that you have disbelief in that thing it means that your belief is wavering. That there is hesitation. That there is indecision. I'll tell you doubt in some ways is one of the most vicious things that we face, ugly, horrible. It can cripple us. Kill us. But doubt is also absolutely

a normal part of human behavior. What happens is a lot of times we cover our doubt. We say it is a sign of weakness. You know-I wouldn't want anyone to know that I have these kind of doubts. That I am unsure. The coach tells his athletes if you go into the game and you have doubts that your going to win, that will become a self-fulfilling prophesy and you will probably lose just because you had those doubts at the beginning. The same thing might be true of Christians. We think of ourselves that if we start to doubt some Christian doctrine maybe that is a sign that we don't even have salvation. And that is particularly frightening in its eternal consequences. Or if you start to doubt whether you ought to marry your fiancée maybe that will be misconstrued as a lack of love. Yes, there are problems with doubt but we all do it. Even David did it. David the mighty warrior. The man after God's own heart. The sweet psalmist of Israel. The forefather of Jesus Christ-doubted. And he declared his doubts. He writes, he sings, "Hear O Lord; hear O Lord when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me. He doubted the confidence that he just described. What he said in verse 3 now in verse 7 he doubts whether it is true. Thou has said, "seek ye my face! My heart says to thee, thy face Lord do I seek. Hide not thy face from me." You see his worries? He's afraid he will get out there in the battle and then when everyone is around him-when the spears are flying and the horses and chariots are attacking he is wondering if God will then hide. And just leave him there right in the middle of the battle to fight it all by himself. He sings on-Turn not thy servant away in anger. Thou who has been my help cast me not off. Forsake me not O God of my salvation. He fears that the God who saved him in verse 1 is the God who is going to give up on him. Quit on him. Forsake him. "Teach me thy way, O Lord; and lead me on a level path because of my enemies." David wants to go the right way. He knows. He is a smart man. He is a Godly man. He knows that many times in life there is a good way and a bad way and he clearly wants to choose the good way, but he prays something that I have prayed and I guess that you pray too. And that is God make it a level path. I'm tired of the ups and downs. I tired of the bumps and the ditches. I'll go the right way but God smooth it out for me. Make it a level path. Teach me thy way O Lord, I'll go the right way and lead me on a level path, because of my enemies. It is hard enough as it is but don't make the path bumpy or difficult. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. He is saying-God-God make me a winner and not a loser in the battle. Hey! What's has happened to this guy? This is the guy who is shouting about confidence and believes in God and is going to win the battle and the victory and sings the song with the

choir that is sung this morning-and in fact wrote it. Now he has all these doubts. Where did his confidence go? I mean is he some kind of a hypocrite? He says one thing one minute and another thing another minute. Or has he lost his faith? Or is he just like us? Do we not one moment quote the verses, claim the promise, have confidence in God and then like David in the very next moment speak the words of uncertainty and fear and pleading? Now, I'll tell you I find neither failure nor hypocrisy in the honest prayer of uncertainty, but rather there I find the reality of human frailty. I find the painful response of those whose battles are particularly difficult. I find not a lack of faith, but I find the truth of faith that's under stress. Now hear me, my fellow Christians. Don't deny it. Don't ignore it, those uncertainties that come when life's battles rage. Understand that just because you or I have our doubts or uncertainties does not mean that God will crumble under them. Just because we cannot quote his promise or wonder if it will come true does not diminish the impact nor power of that promise. God is strong enough to stand up against any doubt that either of us could ever muster up. God is strong enough to keep his promises even when we are unsure of them. We ought to speak the doubts and our prayers of uncertainty and we ought to discover there a God who understands and a God who intervenes and a God who amazingly and miraculously transforms doubt into courage. That is what happened in David case. So he prays a third prayer at the end of Psalm 27. This is a prayer of courage. Of decision. He has made the decision to believe in spite of his doubts. See faith and confidence don't just automatically appear and then chase the battles away. They are the results of decision, of choice. Like David we must chose between confidence which depends upon God and doubts which depend upon us. So David courageously decides to believe and he sings in verse 13. "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" He has decided. Decided to believe God for a good outcome that cannot be presently seen. And of course, that is exactly what faith is. He has decided that he will no longer operate on the basis of apparent circumstances but on the basis of divine confidence. What's changed? Nothing has changed. God hasn't given him any new promises. God hasn't changed the battle. He has no fewer critics. The dangers have not been dissipated. All of those circumstances, all of those promises are identical in the first six verses and the second six verses. The difference is in David and what he decides in the last two verses. He has courageously decided to depend upon God in confidence. And for him it is a life transforming difference. For us it is a life transforming difference. Because when we are weary of the battle of life. When we think that we cannot stand

up under it any longer, when we are crumbling under the doubts that is precisely the time to courageously decide to put confidence in God. Mostly because there is no place else to go. To put confidence in God and to depend upon him. Go back to verse one and say, 'if this God can save me, if he can cast the light and bring the salvation then there isn't any one or anything to fear.' I will decide to have confidence in him in spite of my doubts. That was David's decision. That and the decision to wait in spite of the pressures. Maybe his second decision was even more monumental than his first. He decides to depend upon God not only for the ultimate outcome. I think that is hard, but that is comparatively easy-when we turn to God and say: "God it is tough but I know in the long haul you'll make it good." But it is something else to sing what David sings at the end of the song. "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yea! Wait for the Lord." Oh how hard it is to wait. When unemployed it is particularly hard to wait. When you don't have a job and you go through the struggle and you turn to the Lord and you say, "God I have confidence in you. I believe that you will bring me the right job. I'd like it this week. I like to get a call back on one of those applications-now Lord. I don't want to wait. Or when wanting a baby you go to God and you say, "Father I have confidence in you. Even though we have waited so very long and no child has been born. God I have confidence in you that you will do what right and I am going to trust you all the way. Lord it sure would be nice to have a positive pregnancy test by the first of the month." Or, or when the battle is financial. To say: God I just think I am going to break under this. People are demanding payment. I can't make ends meet. I don't know how to put it together. Everything that I do seems to get me deeper into the pit. I don't know what to do. God I am going to have confidence in you because I can't depend on anyone else. I will trust you entirely. But Lord you know the Readers Digest Sweepstakes that I sent in Monday morning would be great timing. I'll be sure to give you the credit and tithe-just Lord-Nah! Wait. Yeah wait for the Lord. Have courageous confidence not only that we will win the battle rather than he will win the battle for us. But that he will do it in the right time. Now look I don't know what your battles are although I think I have some pretty good guesses. I know that you have them and so it is your individual decision on whether to go with the doubts or dependence upon God. Whether to surrender and give in or to courageously fight on with confidence. Marshall Folke* was the commander of the French ninth army on the night of September 8, 1914 at the battle of Marne*, Folke was leading his men in a losing battle. The German's outnumbered the French 200,000 to 120,000 almost two

to one. The battle was going poorly. The French were suffering a punishing, punishing defeat. A bloodletting. And it came time for that French general to make his decision and to issue his order on what to do. Here is what he said. "My center is giving away. My right is pushed back. Situation excellent. I am attacking!" Attack he did. And even though outnumbered almost two to one the French ninth army that night on September of 1914 routed the German forces, won the battle and eventually marched on to an allied victory in World War I. Let me tell you General Ferdinand Folke had confidence. A great deal of confidence. He had confidence in his country. He had confidence in his armaments. He had confidence in his men, and he had confidence in himself. Even though they were losing. Now if a man can do that how much greater ought our dependence, our confidence-even if there are doubts, be in God. In his power. In his promises. In his goodness and his grace even though we are losing. Now like Folke we may say, "My center is giving away. My right is pushed back. Situation excellent. I am attacking." Or better yet, we may sing with David. "Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though a war arise against me, I will be confident. Because I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Wait. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!